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**Tuesday, February 12, 2008**

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## OAKLAND AUTHOR'S THERAPEUTIC MEMOIR

### Abused son of killer turns secret pain into open book

February 12, 2008

BY L.L. BRASIER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Chip St. Clair spent most of his young life looking for answers.

Why did his parents often snatch him up in the middle of the night and move? Why did his father frequently threaten him and beat his mother?

#### Advertisement

And when he learned at age 23 that the man he knew as his father, David St. Clair, was in truth Michael Grant, a child killer and escaped convict, he had even more questions.

Had he been snatched from some other family early on, as Grant had sometimes implied? And if so, who was he and where did he come from?

Today, St. Clair, now 32, has some answers, plus a job advocating for abused children and a new book in stores this month, "The Butterfly Garden: Surviving Childhood on the Run With One of America's Most Wanted."

"It was a long journey, and in the beginning I didn't know where my life was headed," St. Clair, who lives in Oakland County, said in an interview this month. "But what I learned is really remarkable, that when you dig deep inside yourself to try to find what you're made of, you can take a lot of pain and turn it into something positive."

"The Butterfly Garden" (HCI Publishing, \$15.95) is St. Clair's story of triumph, of his life with Grant and Leslie Carole, and the abuse he suffered at Grant's hands. St. Clair lived in fear of his ferocious father, who once dangled him from the balcony of a high-rise apartment.

In his book, St. Clair recounts how as a young boy, he escaped the misery by losing himself in books and fantasizing that some day he could be free of his parents. His freedom came in 1998, after Grant beat him, dislocating his right shoulder. The police were called and Grant was arrested.

His fingerprints matched those of a convict who had escaped from an Indiana prison in 1973 while serving time for the 1970 beating death of a toddler.

"When you deal with an abusive setting like I did, you almost become so complacent and so paralyzed with fear that you don't end up making the decisions that would help you get out of that environment," St. Clair said of why he remained with Grant into adulthood.

Grant was sent back to prison in 1998, and St. Clair began an earnest search for his identity, wondering if perhaps he was not Grant's son. Following a 2002 report in the Free Press, his story went national, and he was soon on the TV news programs "Dateline" and "Good Morning America."

Justice for Children, a Houston-based nonprofit agency, hired him as a regional director.

Finally, in 2004, St. Clair obtained DNA from Grant, who was still in an Indiana prison. Grant, he learned with mixed emotions, was his biological father.

"Nobody would want to know for a fact that your father is a child killer," St. Clair said. "On the other hand, I was just happy that there wasn't a family out there who had been missing a child."

Grant was released in 2007, but has not had contact with his son. St. Clair remains estranged from his mother.

St. Clair said his book is one more step in healing.

"I'm very happy today," he said. "I'm content with where my life is headed. I feel a peace and contentment with my wife, Lisa, and want everybody to know that anybody can have hope for the future."

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## **HOUSE DEMS PUSHING SENIOR PROTECTION PACKAGE**

Gongwer News Service

Feb. 11, 2008

Based on [recommendations](#) from the governor's Task Force on Elder Abuse in 2006, House Democrats announced Monday they will soon be acting on a package of bills aimed at establishing stiffer penalties for senior citizen abuse, as well as protecting them from financial exploitation.

The legislation, some of which has been introduced, will be taken up by the House Senior Health, Security and Retirement Committee. The panel has scheduled testimony for this week on one of the measures ([HB 5669](#)), which prohibits magistrates from denying a complaint of abuse - and thereby not moving ahead with an arrest warrant - just because the person who signed the complaint is someone other than the alleged victim.

Other components of the 11-bill legislative package include measures to:

- mandate that people working for financial institutions report suspected elder abuse and that their reports be immune from civil liability;
- require financial institutions to give joint accountholders a written summary of their rights;
- ban people convicted of abusing an elder from inheriting their victim's estate;
- permit county medical examiners to establish elder death review teams in cases involving a suspicious death ([HB 5581](#));
- provide definitions for financial exploitation in the Michigan Social Welfare Act and the rights of individuals who are incapacitated ([HB 5499](#)); and
- mandate that an individual who has power of attorney on a senior citizen's behalf sign a contract describing their responsibilities.
- 

"As people get older, they often have to rely on others to help them out with their finances, which can leave them open to being victimized," said [Rep. Mark Meadows](#) (D-East Lansing), one of the bill sponsors. "Elder abuse is a sad reality - seniors can't always rely on family members and caregivers to do what's best for them. We must take action to protect our seniors."

[Rep. Joan Bauer](#) (D-Lansing), another bill sponsor, said the issue is particularly important as Michigan experiences an aging population. According to the task force, an estimated 73,000 Michigan senior citizens are victims of abuse. In 2005, the state's adult protective services program received 14,641 referrals of suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of a senior citizen or a person with a disability.

[Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) offered a statement of support for the legislation, saying, "We have an obligation to protect our seniors from criminals who are abandoning, abusing, neglecting, or financially exploiting them for their own gain. I applaud the House Democrats for focusing attention on this critical issue and look forward to working with them to protect our seniors."

But while it supports keeping the state's senior citizens protected, the Michigan Bankers Association still has questions about the specifics of the legislation in regard to its affect on banks, said Government Relations Vice President John Llewellyn.

Mr. Llewellyn said while it's easy for a bank teller to recognize if a senior citizen is being physically abused, that doesn't hold true for identifying whether they are the victim of financial abuse.

"Do we want to report? You bet. The question is how do you recognize it? The hard (situation) is the son or daughter who has power of attorney who is (taking money)," he said.

Mr. Llewellyn also says the legislation could put younger bank employees in a bad spot for asking every person they think is a senior citizen whether they should be taking money out of their account or not.

"What year does a person become incompetent?" he queried. "We always have these questions."

And in terms of the information joint accountholders receive, individuals are already told that having such a setup means each person has equal access to the money, he said.

Mr. Meadows said he understands that financial institutions will want to limit their liability, but "it's about protecting individuals."

Mr. Llewellyn said his group is open to addressing the issue and does want to see details of the legislation. Phyllis Washburn, spokesperson for the House Republican Caucus, said GOP members too have legislation they want to see voted on that will protect senior citizens from bad financial situations.

"Having not seen the bills, however, I would hope this is not more legislation from the Democrats to over-regulate businesses for the sake of regulation, but rather an attempt at balancing elder protections to make sure whatever is adopted doesn't just grab a headline, it actually solves a problem," she said. "Our caucus will continue to fight to protect seniors and those struggling in this economy, because elder abuse is a growing problem and it must be addressed immediately."

Dr. Dean Sienko, Ingham County medical examiner, said he supports the death review team legislation because it's something only his county and Genesee County has been doing. In the first year of its operations, the Ingham County review team's work has led to one conviction of a person who intentionally overdosed a senior citizen, as well as one situation where a senior accidentally overdosed and that led to greater restrictions on prescription drug disbursements in the county, he said.

During the press conference in East Lansing, a state official also announced they had received a three-year grant that will be used to train law enforcement in specifically dealing with elder abuse.



02/11/2008

## CA/N Council roof sit raises \$12,000

Kate Hessling , The Huron Daily Tribune

**BAD AXE** — Volunteers from area organizations shivered their way through the 12th Annual Child Abuse/Neglect Council Roof Sit Friday at McDonald's Food & Family Center.

Cathy Stinson, CA/N Council vice president and fund raising committee co-chairperson, said the annual event raised \$12,000 — and there still are fund raisers going on the rest of the month so that total is likely to increase.

"It was a great day," Stinson said. " ... We have a fantastic community."

Each year the goal is to beat the previous year's totals, Stinson said. Because last year's Roof Sit raised about \$10,000, she was happy to report the organization made it.

"And there's still more," she said, referring to additional monies that will be earned in other fund raisers this month.

The Huron County CA/N Council is a group of professionals, parents and volunteers who joined together to sponsor programs that prevent the abuse and neglect of children through awareness and education.

All monies raised in Huron County stay in Huron County to fund local programs. The CA/N Council is a member of the Michigan Children's Trust Fund (CTF), a non-profit organization that is a chapter of prevent Child Abuse America. The sole purpose of that organization is the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Each year, the Huron County CA/N Council receives \$10,000 from CTF for programs in the local area.

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## Suit against state foster care delivers another blow

As advocate details 5 deaths, DHS says studies are flawed

February 12, 2008

BY JOHN WISELY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

State record keeping is so shoddy and investigations are so superficial that children in Michigan's foster care system face continuing danger of physical abuse, according to a report compiled as part of a class action against the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The findings come in the latest in a series of reports compiled for Children's Rights, a national child-welfare advocacy group suing the state over the way it treats children in foster care. The suit is aimed at forcing the state to improve the system.

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The most recent report, by John Goad, a child welfare official in Nevada who specializes in child abuse investigations, compared Michigan's child welfare managers to blindfolded bus drivers, oblivious to the dangers they pose.

"Children who are placed in the custody of" the Michigan DHS "because they were not safe with their families are highly likely to be in danger in the very foster care system intended to protect them," Goad wrote in his report.

State officials called the reports one-sided, noting the experts who compiled them have been hired to do similar reports in other lawsuits in other states.

"These reports that were authored by third parties selected and paid by Children's Rights lack balance, overstate and generalize findings from a biased, nonrepresentative sample of cases to support the Children's Rights agenda," DHS spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said in a written statement.

"Although Children's Rights continues to attempt to litigate this case in the court of public opinion, DHS will appropriately reserve specific comments for the appropriate forum -- the court."

The federal lawsuit is scheduled to go to trial in June in Detroit.

Sorbet said the state would consult its own experts to provide the court with a more balanced look at the system. She added that the state is hiring more caseworkers and making other improvements to the system.

In his report, Goad reviewed five cases during the past four years in which children died in foster care. The cases involve:

- A 2-year-old boy beaten and burned to death in a foster home that had been cited for maltreatment nine times before he was placed there.
- A 14-year-old girl diagnosed with depression who hanged herself in foster care after the state failed to address her mental health problems.

- A 15-month-old girl beaten to death while staying with her mother and grandparents in foster care after suffering previous abuse that resulted in a fractured skull and a burned foot.
- A 7-week-old boy who appeared to have suffocated from a pillow on an adult bed.
- A 3 1/2 -year-old boy who died of head injuries in the foster home of a woman found to have abused her own daughter the previous year.

"The system in Michigan is in dire need of reform," said Sara Bartosz, an attorney for Children's Rights.

"The holes have been known and outside experts have identified them."

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Tuesday, February 12, 2008

# State assailed on child welfare

## Officials dismiss report that says lax procedures put foster kids in danger.

**Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News**

The Michigan Department of Human Services' standards for investigating child abuse are lax, allow for vague findings and place the state's 19,000 foster children in danger, according to a new report commissioned by a group seeking court-ordered reform of the state's foster care system.

Michigan's child welfare program is riddled with problems, including overloaded case workers, overcrowded foster homes and rules that allow foster children to be placed with relatives who are dangerous, according to the report that analyzed nearly 10,000 documents related to the deaths of five children in Michigan foster homes. The 75-page report also points to numerous management problems, including a decentralized agency with staff members who have little understanding about the fundamentals of child welfare.

State officials scoffed at the report, which was paid for by Children's Rights.

"These reports lack balance, overstate and generalize findings from a biased, non-representative sample of cases to support the Children's Rights agenda," spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said in a statement.

"These same parties provided similar reports in litigation in other states and, as such, only represent one side of the case and a limited perspective on Michigan's child welfare system."

The reports say the state was directly responsible for some of the child deaths and failed to rescue other children living in dangerous foster homes.

"What's really striking and frankly horrifying is that the report gives us a tip of an iceberg of children taken into the care of Michigan's foster care system -- five kids who died because of poor efforts to surround them with the proper services and a safety net," said Sara Bartosz, an attorney for Children's Rights, a New York-based advocacy organization that has filed a class action lawsuit against the state. "It shows a history of a management that has seen holes in a safety net but even after children have died have not fixed and mended that safety net."

This is the third report in a week issued by Children's Rights. A court-appointed expert did the first report. But Monday's report and one released late Friday were commissioned by Children's Rights as the organization prepares to go to trial in June.

Authored by John Goad, an Illinois-based consultant and child welfare expert, Monday's report is an analysis of management and practices of the state foster care system. Goad studied state documents related to the cases of five children who died in the state's care, including 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge, who was killed in a Detroit foster home in 2006, and 3-year-old James Earl Bradley Jr., who was murdered in a Van Buren Township home in 2007.

Child abuse and neglect investigators do not yield enough evidence and "often make determinations that are not consistent with the facts," according to the report. As an example, the report points to the death of James, which a coroner ruled a homicide and physician said likely resulted from child abuse. But the Michigan Department of Human Services investigation showed that there was not a preponderance of evidence to support child abuse, a conclusion the report called "entirely inconsistent with facts and ridiculous."

The department also failed to thoroughly investigate burns on the toddler's hand before he died.

"By failing to quickly and thoroughly investigate this complaint, (the state) may well have missed its opportunity to save James's life," the report said.

The caseworker for Isaac was juggling between 37 and 46 cases -- well beyond the state maximum caseload of 30 children.

It also showed that Isaac was placed in two foster homes that together were targeted in 16 complaints. Though only two of the complaints were substantiated, the report cited four complaints that should have been substantiated and seven complaints that were so poorly investigated it was unclear what the outcome should have been. These poorly investigated complaints, the report said, failed to make contact with obvious people with information such as treating doctors.

"Had these investigations been handled competently, Isaac would not have been beaten, burned and murdered in a (state) foster home," the report said.

*You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024.*

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Monday, February 11, 2008

# Report blames state agency for deaths of foster children

**Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News**

The Michigan Department of Human Services is directly responsible for the deaths of several foster children because it is unable to grasp and respond to looming dangers to 19,000 foster children in its care, according to an independent report issued today by an organization seeking court-ordered reform of Michigan's foster care system.

"The overall conclusion of the review is that children who are placed in the custody of MDHS because they were not safe with their families are highly likely to be in danger in the very foster care system intended to protect them," said the report prepared by John Goad, an Illinois-based consultant with more than three decades of experience in child protective services.

The 75-page report is the third report issued in the past week by Children's Rights, a New York-based child advocacy organization that filed a class action lawsuit against the state, alleging that the state's foster children's constitutional rights are being violated because of the numerous problems within the system. It will be used during the trial, scheduled for June.

The report examines the deaths of five children who died in the state's care, including Isaac Lethbridge, who was murdered in a Detroit foster home at the age of two.

It cites systemic problems resulting in the deaths of these children including the department's failure to adequately investigate allegations of abuse and neglect, saying that not enough evidence is collected and "often make determinations that are not consistent with the facts."

The report also says the Department of Human Services is inefficient and lacks a program to offer reliable data about its practices. It also says its managers are inexperienced and under-educated.

"While the Michigan Department of Human Services has tried to distance itself from the disastrous results of its dangerous practices, children have been dying in its custody and on its watch," Sara Bartosz, attorney for Children's Rights, said in a prepared statement.

Officials from the Department of Human Services were not immediately available for comment.

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## THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

### State's foster care system in shambles

Monday, February 11, 2008

It is no secret that Michigan's state budget problems have forced repeated budget cuts over the years. It has forced state officials to find other ways to provide services and to decide whether to end some services entirely. That's not all bad.

But, no matter the circumstances, the state's budget woes should never endanger the most vulnerable among us, the children.

Last week, a court-ordered study of Michigan's foster care system discovered some egregious lapses in the monitoring of cases.

The study, ordered by U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmonds and conducted by the nonprofit group Children's Research Center in Madison, Wis., collected information from 460 cases around the state.

It discovered:

- Caseworkers failed to make mandated visits to foster children within 30 days of placement in 76 percent of the cases examined.
- Caseworkers failed to do follow-up visits after 30 days in over 30 percent of the cases.
- In 35 percent of the cases in which children were placed with relatives, the state failed to do criminal or child abuse records checks.
- In 22 percent of the cases studied, children did not receive at least one medical exam.

Because of deficiencies in Michigan's foster care system, which now has about 19,000 children, the state is being sued by Children's Rights, a national child advocacy group that alleges the state's foster care system is harming children.

After the suit was filed in August 2006, state officials indicated they wanted to settle. But then it became apparent the state had no money to improve the system and settlement talks ended last year. The study was conducted between September and December 2007. A trial is scheduled for June.

The situation is inexcusable.

We believe the Granholm administration and the Legislature recognize this. Lawmakers authorized funding in the 2008 budget for 300 new children's services positions.

It appears that this addition of children's services workers would improve services to children in foster care in Michigan. But state officials need to make sure that is the case.

The state's young wards deserve protection, stability, access to health care and education.

The courts and children's advocates must continue to monitor the state's foster care system until these problems are resolved.

The Kalamazoo Gazette

## Shelter fills as weather gets harsh

STAFF REPORT

People wait in line for dinner service at the Holland Rescue Mission Monday.

Dennis R.J. Geppert

Single-digit temperatures, blowing snow and ice in recent days have caused schools to close, led people to flock to shelters and raised concerns about heating costs.

The Holland Rescue Mission on River Avenue reported Monday that it had 90 percent of its beds filled at the men's center, with only five beds available.

Harsh winter conditions play a part in the lack of beds available, said Executive Director Darryl Bartlett. Because of the limited supply of beds, the mission is admitting only locals from Ottawa and northern Allegan counties.

"We need to respond to the needs of our own in our area," Bartlett said.

The high temperature through 5 p.m. Monday was 14 degrees. The low for the 24-hour period was 7 degrees. Four inches of snow fell between 4 p.m. Sunday and 4 p.m. Monday.

Katherine Van Hall, assessment and eligibility specialist for the Ottawa County Community Action Agency, said cold days like these are the busiest for the agency, which assists individuals who have had their heat or other utilities shut off because they cannot pay the bills.

"I had 20 phone messages when I came in today to attend to," she said.

Unfortunately, Van Hall said not everyone who calls can be helped.

"We're turning a lot of people away just because not everyone is eligible," she said.

To be eligible for utility assistance, a person must present certain documents, including photo ID and Social Security card. He or she must also show proof of some type of income and reasons why the utility bills cannot be paid. If an individual cannot meet the criteria, there is still hope, Van Hall said.

The Department of Human Services and the Salvation Army are available to help residents.

Van Hall encouraged people to call (616) 393-4433 to assess their situation.

Cold and snowy weather also caused area schools to shut down Monday.

A string of snow days the last two weeks has depleted the number of extra hours in local school calendars, and make-up days later in the year are looking like a possibility. The Michigan Department of Education stipulates that schools need to give students at least 1,098 hours of classroom instruction, but schools can close for 30 hours due to weather, health or emergency conditions.

Area schools are running out of snow days before they need to schedule make-up days. Paula Hoeker, a data manager for Holland Public Schools, said the district had already called four snow days and could call one more without running over budget.

If the district runs over budget, extra days might be added onto the end of the year or taken off of a school break, she said.

"It's not always easy just to add days," said district spokesman Tom Page. "It affects schedules and there is a cost."

### **Snow days**

School districts build several extra days into their schedules to account for snow days each school year. That number varies among districts.

Used so far

West Ottawa: 5

Holland: 4

Zeeland: 4

Hamilton: 3

Saugatuck: 4

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## Budget: Granholm crafts low-conflict plan with solid priorities

### Our opinions

Gov. Jennifer Granholm's 2009 spending plan, now before the Legislature, is the best Michigan budget in years.

Unlike so many of its immediate predecessors, this budget has far fewer accounting tricks and far more stability when it comes to revenue.

Michigan still has a structural budget deficit, which Granholm is masking rather than confronting. But after the brutal battles of 2007, this year's budget talks should occur largely on the margins: Who gets the small increases; who faces the smaller cuts.

### Higher ed, schools fare well

In that regard, Granholm is exhibiting the proper set of priorities:

- She wants more money for universities, with state aid for flagship schools, such as Michigan State, based on a formula weighted more toward research and the practical application of it in the marketplace.
- She wants more money for local classrooms. Gran-holm plans a bump, ranging from \$108 to \$216, in the per-pupil grant that funds school operations.
- She wants to hold down spending on the Department of Corrections, which has grown by leaps and bounds in the last 20 years. Granholm plans for a \$50 million savings through efficiencies and cuts. That's a start. But DOC still would consume nearly \$2 billion from the state's roughly \$10 billion general fund.
- Granholm has no plans for a tax increase, citing the revenue progress made from last year's tax work.

That should help keep the partisan temperatures down - part of the ongoing campaign in Lansing, from leaders of both major parties, to be seen as problem-solvers, not political squawkers.

- Granholm even calls for a major deposit in the state's "rainy day" fund, earmarking \$100 million for the purpose.

With Michigan's ongoing struggles and now the national economy tipping toward recession, if not there already, any chance to save money is best taken.

- The governor also wants a \$16 million boost in so-called "statutory" revenue sharing funds for local governments.

Townships and cities are eager for the help. But on this issue, citizens can gain a perspective on how a potentially agreeable budget year does not mean a fiscal problem solved.

### **Structural problems remain**

State lawmakers have balanced budgets in recent years, in part, by stiffing local governments, by deferring spending problems to others.

The Michigan Municipal League says \$2.5 billion in revenue sharing money for local governments has been lost in the last six years. Compared to that, the \$16 million Granholm boost is skimpy indeed.

But, by continuing to divert revenue sharing money from local governments and counties, Granholm expects to "save" more than \$500 million for the 2009 budget. That is a big reason she can push for spending increases for key programs without addressing the structural deficit or asking for more taxes.

The politics are good, especially for a state fed up with the battles from last year.

But it still means that Michigan lacks the resources to meet its commitments on an annual basis. For example, Michigan has about \$9.2 billion in general fund revenue for the 2009 budget, yet Granholm expects to spend about \$9.9 billion.

In his response to Granholm's plan, Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, warned about spending increases and the need for more government efficiency.

How does Michigan connect such sensible philosophy to practical matters? The state rightly wants to spend more on education and colleges. And combine higher education with health care and corrections, and you've gobbled up about \$7 billion of the \$9.9 billion planned spending. Add in the Department of Human Services, which runs, among other things, child protection services, and it's \$8.4 billion out of \$9.9 billion.

That's largely how one gets to a structural deficit, spending on things people want, without ensuring the revenue to cover it.

As Granholm's budget shows, Michigan can slip through another year. But the state still has serious budget problems.

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## WSU-DMC dispute deepens

'This mess is just beginning to unravel,' Duggan tells staff

February 12, 2008

BY PATRICIA ANSTETT

FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER

The latest impasse between the Detroit Medical Center and the Wayne State University School of Medicine worsened Monday, despite Gov. Jennifer Granholm's hand-picked mediator working to resolve the dispute.

Ending several days of public silence, Mike Duggan, CEO and president of the medical center, e-mailed DMC employees Monday morning, saying he expects differences over the Medical Center's annual payments to WSU will be "headed for court."

### Advertisement

"This mess is just beginning to unravel," Duggan told employees.

The eroding relationship between Detroit's two most important clinical partners worsened Feb. 1 when the DMC delivered a letter to the medical school saying it would reduce annual payments it makes to WSU from \$19 million to \$7 million.

The cuts took effect Monday and are retroactive to October.

Dr. Robert Frank, associate dean of the medical school, said Monday he continues to analyze the impact of the reductions, including possible cuts in services and doctor layoffs.

"We can't just absorb this," he said. "There will be serious consequences" if the money is not restored, Frank said. WSU may sue DMC, he added.

The money in contention is from Medicaid payments Michigan gives DMC for the care of uninsured and underinsured patients, and for graduate medical education costs. DMC gives a portion of the money, known as disproportionate share funds, to WSU.

Duggan's e-mail said the DMC reduced the payments because, since October, the medical school has received an additional \$17 million from the state to care for uninsured and underinsured patients, beyond the \$19-million DMC passes on to the medical school for the same purpose.

Calling the \$17 million a "double payment," Duggan said in his e-mail that "an outside legal opinion" for the DMC board of trustees said the payments "could well violate federal laws on excessive physician compensation."

Frank confirmed that WSU receives some Medicaid money directly from the state, but that it covers higher costs to care for the poor and isn't a double payment.

"We want an independent third party to confirm or deny" payments required by WSU's contract with the DMC and "in the meantime, we should continue to be paid," Frank said. "We signed a 3 1/2 -year agreement that Mike Duggan, after 1 1/2 years, decided to cut by more than half."

Frank is referring to the November 2006 contract between WSU and DMC in which DMC agreed to pay the medical school \$19 million a year for patient care and medical education programs.

The agreement was brokered by David Fink, a Rochester attorney appointed by Granholm, to resolve differences between the two partners. "I have no problem telling you there are open lines of communications," Fink said Monday during a telephone interview. Asked whether progress has been made, Fink said: "I suppose how you define progress depends on your perspective."

The relationship between the two partners has been strained for several years over numerous issues, including new strategic alliances WSU has begun with Dearborn's Oakwood Healthcare System to jointly operate several graduate medical education programs that DMC stopped running with the medical school in the past two years.

Tensions heightened last year when the DMC competed heavily over WSU's objections to win designation as one of two metro Detroit campuses for Michigan State University's College of Osteopathic Medicine.

What's unclear is what role Fink has played and what contribution he has made to settling differences or resolving the latest dispute.

Fink said he has "been actively involved with both parties since Feb. 1," the day the medical center delivered the letter to the medical school.

He declined to give specifics, adding: "The best opportunity for resolution of this is not to air whatever differences exist. I can tell you ... both DMC and WSU remain unalterably committed to the delivery of high-quality medicine services to the metropolitan Detroit population, to providing graduate medical education and to doing valuable life-saving research. These are two great institutions doing great things together. I'm confident they will continue to work together" in the future, he said.

Louis Lessem, WSU general counsel, confirmed that he has talked to Fink several times in the last week about the latest dispute.

"He's had shuttle discussions," mostly by telephone with him or DMC attorneys, Lessem said.

Duggan on Monday did not return calls from the Free Press for the third consecutive workday.

In his e-mail, he said he has declined to talk with the media because he questions the wisdom of publicly airing details of a business dispute.

In a related development, the president of the 15,000-member Michigan State Medical Society said the dispute "will require common-sense leaders seeking common ground for the common good."

"Patient care must not be compromised in this dispute," said Dr. AppaRao Mukkamala, president of the organization.

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